

Garrison and 'JFK plot'

Is prosecutor's drive an obsession with riddle?

Last in a series.

By Richard N. Billings

On a national television show recently Jim Garrison was asked whether he really believed the U.S. government was concealing facts that would prove the Kennedy assassination was the climax of a conspiracy. "Why don't you ask Lyndon Johnson?" was the New Orleans district attorney's caustic reply.

That Garrison would make such a remark is no longer surprising, but the enthusiastic applause of the studio audience came as a shock. It confirmed the extent of Garrison's success, now that he had decided to take The Case to the American public.

THE SOPHISTICATED way to treat a demagog like Garrison is to ignore him. This is what most of the national news

organizations are doing in the futile hope that he will simply burn himself out. The National Broadcasting Co. took a different approach some time ago. It sent Walter Sheridan, an experienced Washington investigator, to New Orleans to assess the situation.

Garrison, of course, decided that Sheridan was a spy for the Washington Establishment, which he was not, though he did communicate directly with

his old friend and boss at the Justice Department, Robert Kennedy.

Sheridan decided Garrison was a phony and that The Case was a trumped-up fraud, and NBC produced a one-hour report that implied just that. It was an honest attempt to set the record straight, but Sheridan fell into the same pitfalls that Garrison is wont to do. He relied on witnesses

whose testimony can be shot to pieces.

AN EXAMPLE is Dean Andrews, the lawyer-witness who since has been convicted of perjury by Garrison. Andrews said on the NBC program he had fed Garrison some imaginary names, "just to see how far the cat would go." One of the names was

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Here's another Gunko-Boy trying to discredit Garrison!

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Ricardo Davis, a supposedly non-existent man.

In actual fact Ricardo Davis is a Cuban now living in Houston. In 1963 he was instrumental in setting up an anti-Castro training camp in Louisiana, and he may well have a great deal of information that is pertinent to Garrison's investigation.

Real Bertrand

NBC also revealed it had located the "real Clay Bertrand." The network said he was a prominent homosexual who lived in New Orleans. A man named Eugene Davis later volunteered he was the man NBC had found. David vehemently denied he had ever used the name, Clay Bertrand.

The upshot of the NBC expose was that the network was compelled to give Garrison half an hour of equal time. Judging by the response he received by telegrams the next day, the prosecutor used his rebuttal to advantage, although he said nothing that would enlighten the curious. Perhaps he didn't have to, for by that time two-thirds of the American people, according to a Harris poll, were not believing the Warren Report.

ANOTHER WAY to contend with Garrison has been to dismiss him as a certifiable nut. Opponents of this approach find comfort in the fact that during the Korean War he was discharged from the Army because of mental instability.

Garrison may have his irrational moments, but he's not a psychopath. He could be a paranoid perhaps, for that is an apt description of any man who spends night and day brooding about the assassination. As one of his assistants puts it: "We're all obsessed with this thing. I can't think of anything else. I dream about it at night, and the next day I can't separate the dream from reality."

If anything, this kind of obsession will sustain Garrison rather than destroy him.

Political motive?

It also is popular to regard Garrison as an ambitious public official who has latched onto the assassination for the immediate political advantage. Politics and politicians are transitory, so the theory goes, and Garrison will forget the assassination, as soon as another issue comes along.

Again there is a fallacy, for Garrison's motive is much



Jim Garrison

more personal than it is political.

"Mine is a perfectly selfish motive," he allows. "It is the satisfaction of solving the riddle nobody else has been able to solve. There is a certain satisfaction in bringing to light a truth that's been hidden."

CONTENDING WITH Garrison has been Washington's problem for some time. Officially, the federal government won't admit he's worthy of concern, while in fact the FBI watches every move he makes. Agents trail him whenever he leaves New Orleans. (There is a story on the West Coast that the way to find Garrison when he comes to town is to call the FBI.)

Attorney General Ramsey Clark has been quoted as saying Garrison should be prosecuted, because he "took a perfectly fine man, Clay Shaw, and ruined him just for per-

sonal aggrandizement." But the Justice Department has given no indication it really intends to make a case against the New Orleans prosecutor.

Garrison argues that Washington is fighting back with the power of the cloak and dagger. His old nemesis, the CIA, he has charged over and over again, is leading the counterattack. His specific allegation is that lawyers defending suspects and material witnesses are on the CIA payroll.

CIA informer?

One man in particular is accused of receiving CIA support, and it is logical he would, says Garrison, because he's an old employee of the agency. He is Gordon Novel, an enigmatic electronics expert who once was a secret informer for Garrison, then a witness, then a material witness and eventually a suspect, all in the space of a couple of months.

Novel first came to Garri-

son with a story about an explosives robbery in 1961. Garrison was interested, because, according to Novel, David Ferrie and Sergio Arcacha were in on it. But Garrison became enraged when he learned Novel has passed along information to Sheridan of NBC, and he issued a subpoena for his former informer. Rather than face the grand jury, Novel left New Orleans.

GARRISON became even more convinced of Novel's connection with the intelligence agency when the draft of a letter written by Novel was found in an apartment he had abandoned. Addressed to a Mr. Weiss, its first paragraph begins: "This letter is to inform you that Jim Garrison has subpoenaed myself and an associate to testify before his grand jury on matters which may be classified top secret. Actions of individual's concerned with Double Check Corporation of Miami."

That was enough for Garrison, who knew that Double Check was the name of a CIA company operating in Miami at the time of the Bay of

Pigs invasion. Even an objective observer was forced to conclude: either Garrison was right, Novel was an agent or the D.A. was the butt of a marvelous practical joke.

Faulty premise

The vulnerability of the federal government in the Garrison affair goes back to the original FBI investigation of the assassination. Even though it was a masterpiece of police work, comprehensive to the extent that every lead was sifted clean, it suffered from a faulty premise. The FBI, it must be charged, considered the case closed shortly after Oswald was arrested.

THERE IS substantial proof that federal investigators purposefully resisted the alternative of conspiracy. Many witnesses have said they were faced with interrogators whose minds were closed. Annie Odio, for example, the younger sister of Sylvia, says she was told to go ahead with her account of the visit of "Leon



Dean Andrews Jr.

Oswald," but the FBI agents said they had no intention of believing her.

An FBI report dated Nov.

23, 1963, substantiates the point. It tells of an informant who advised that in September Loran Hall had redeemed a .30-06 Johnson rifle from a pawn shop in Los Angeles. What Hall did with the rifle is irrelevant, for it turns out he took it to Miami and left it there.

What the FBI concluded, however, is astounding. The closing paragraph of the report reads: "No further investigation was conducted, as it is obvious that the rifle mentioned above was not used in connection with assassination of President Kennedy."

The day after the assassination was a trifle early for the FBI to be making decisions like that.